



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Source of the phenomena which we distinguish as psychical, and of the phenomena which we distinguish as material," but itself not to be "legitimately formulated in terms of either aspect"; though in so far as "the exigencies of finite thinking require us to symbolize the Infinite Power manifested in the world of phenomena, we are clearly bound to symbolize it as quasi-psychical, rather than as quasi-material." *

It is hardly necessary to observe that not a single word of what has here been quoted is in opposition to the Christian revelation. The philosophy of the Unknowable undoubtedly represents one side of the truth, and as such deserves its due place and its due recognition; but when the part is taken for the whole, it becomes false because of its incompleteness. That man cannot by searching find out God, that the creature cannot be taken as the measure of the Creator, nor "the highest form of Being as yet suggested to one petty race of creatures by its ephemeral experience of what is going on in one tiny corner of the universe, be necessarily taken as the equivalent of that absolutely highest form of Being in which all the possibilities of existence are alike comprehended," † is no new discovery of the latest form of scientific enquiry. It was not a "cosmic philosopher" of the 19th century, but a Christian Apostle who spoke of Deity as "dwelling in the light unapproachable, whom no man hath seen nor can see," ‡ whose "judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out," || thus continuing the teaching of the prophets of his nation who had ever maintained the same truth. § The element of agnosticism thus borne witness to, and which all true religion must contain, has been carefully indicated in the two preceding Essays as entering into the Christian Revelation, while at the same time the latter was set forth as what it claims to be,—an actual unveiling of that which in so far as it is unveiled, man can truly know. It now remains to show that such a revelation is not only compatible with the result at which "a purely scientific enquiry" arrives, but is its rational and necessary complement. In course of this demonstration we shall find ourselves answering the question,—What, according to the Christian Revelation, is meant by the environment of Nature being God?

* "Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy," p. 449. † Ibid, p. 431.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 16. || Rom. xi. 33.
§ See 1 Kings viii. 27; Psalm cxlv. 3; Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

REPRESSSED INITIATIVE IN CHILDREN.

By G. R. WILSON, M.B.

(Continued from page 89.)

LIMITED as my time is, I cannot pass from this subject of the exercises and games of girls without emphasising what is, to my mind, an enormously important aspect of it, and one which is almost wholly overlooked. I come back now to the effects on character of muscular pursuits. We all know that the victories of our battlefields are won in the playgrounds of our schools. Games teach endurance, pluck, and skill. They teach much more. There are other qualities of mind more desirable perhaps even than these, which are the appropriate results in character of the ordered conditions and rules of the playground. And my grievance is this, that we deny to girls, to a very important degree, those conditions and rules of play, by the distinction we constantly make between the boy and the girl. I do not see how I can make my point without touching on that very misleading topic of the difference between the male and female character. I do so with great reserve and diffidence.

Women, it is said, are timid, lack self-confidence, and are not often just. Men incline, we are told, to be brutal, arrogant, and severe. I leave the brutality, arrogance, and severity of men aside, as they do not really offer a case in point. They are not the results of repression so much as overgrown elements in the mind. I have already said something of the repression of muscular activities in girl-children as hampering the development of nerve and courage. If girls are less daring than boys, it is not because it is their nature to be cowardly, but because of the mild and milky restrictions which we put upon them. I have spoken too of that self-confidence which muscular skill gives. I repeat that if a child learns muscular confidence, she will be the more disposed to that confidence in herself in larger spheres of life to which we give the name, moral courage. But let us consider more fully this question of justice. There is—and I have seen it often—a sense of fair play in girl-children which is thwarted and repressed by the

methods of the nursery. Daily the girl-child has it impressed upon her mind that she is a girl; that, because of that, many things are denied to her to which she is naturally prone, and which she feels she has a right to. If we treated boys and girls more equally, allowing them to take their chances on a natural and equitable basis, the girls would gladly fall in, go share and share with boys, give and take, and learn necessary right, and necessary concession. But she is taught otherwise. She is a girl, and that makes a difference. The boys are not to enforce the rules of the game strictly with her; she is a girl. In return, she must make concessions to them; she is a girl. When a good thing is going, either the boys give it away to her without demur, or equally without reflection, leave her out, not because she has won it or lost it on her merits, but because she is a girl. Sometimes she is subjected to bullying, not because she could not cope with it, but because, being a girl, she has learned submission—unjust submission. Sometimes she is subjected to a good deal of deference and consideration, not because she has earned it, but because she is a girl. And again the deference is as unjust and as untrue as the bullying. Now I am not so rash as to deny the value of deference and respect to women for the sex's sake. But I wish to emphasise the price we pay for our mode of learning it. Put shortly, boys are allowed to be stronger, and, in early muscular days, cleverer than girls. Here begins that unjust advantage which leaves girls too much at the mercy of boys. Under more or less similar conditions the girl's youth goes on to adult life, and by that time character is generally stereotyped. Is it strange that often stratagem is the girl's substitute for strength, that "finesse" and special pleading usurp the place of conviction? Is it strange that a course of training on a basis of sex, not a reasonable basis, but one which is quite fortuitous, and, in the nursery days, quite unconvincing—is it strange that such a training perverts the sense of what is rightfully due, that, at the worst, it gives deceit for worth, and at the best, gives us women, not justly generous but indiscriminately kind?

We have looked, so to speak, and occupied much time in looking, at the sphere of a few small muscles; the world of ideas is before us, the world of feelings, the world of conduct,

the moral or spiritual life. It is true that we repress much muscular activity in children; but that is trifling compared with the gay and thoughtless way in which we repress the young idea. There are a great many things of course which nobody ought to think about, or doubt, at least not seriously, and a great many things which nobody ought to do unconventionally. We might even be patronizing enough to say that the usual way,—the way which through ages of experience the world has found the best—is really the best. But we must observe, if you please, that he who realises the worth of ideas on his own account has a rich life; he who accepts the verdict of custom, is dull. In our argumentative moods, we incline to accept the dull majority rather than risk the vices of independence. But our instincts in this regard are better than our arguments, for we all love our original friend. You know the kind of woman I mean, one whose authority is all her own; who has had the daring to think independently about many things; in whom the stale and crusted customs of ages, when they are acknowledged, are somehow reproduced to us vividly and glowing with personal charm; one who expresses herself now and then perhaps quietly in confident rebellion against convention in a manner which is truthful and convincing. We have known men of a like mind—free, confident and successful. These are pioneers, and more than pioneers; they are the artists of life. What strikes us most about them is that they are unusual,—the pity of it is that they are so scarce, they freshen life so much, and show us so much.

Put briefly, the initiative mind is one which is not chiefly swayed by convention and by habit. Now our method of education rather tends the other way—or it did a few years ago—tends to turn out a finished article in human substance, according to pattern, at from sixteen to twenty years of age, knowing the customary things, believing common traditions, conducting themselves with conventional propriety, and affecting correct acquaintances. At this time young men are let loose upon the world, and young women are "brought out." The rule is that people abide by the habit of mind which such training fosters.

I do not suppose we quite realise the *moral* value of spontaneous activity in thinking and feeling. Therefore, before we bring an indictment against ourselves for acts of

repression, let us pause to note a point or two on this moral aspect. The mind we desire is the mind of the philanthropist, the mind of the reformer, the mind of the sage. It is the mind whose sensibility does not get used to men and women; their sorrows and their sins do not by habit and wont, fail to impress and to arouse interest; it is a mind whose energies are not restrained by customary hindrances; one which thinks nothing impossible and only a few desirable things unlikely; a mind which meets opposition not without zest; a mind which looks over hedges, and seeing good things beyond, knows when to wait and when to strive. Let me speak of one virtue only, more homely, more nearly our own. It is the observation of all the wise that youth is the period of life and hope; age, that of wisdom and pessimism. To unite the spring and hope of youth to the experience and wisdom of years is rare. That is what we need. And we can only have it if we learn somehow to keep imagination active and refuse to be entirely guided by the appearances of the present tinged with the memory of yesterday's failures. Hope is impossible without imagination, and to keep alive one's fancy through years of hard facts is to have an actively initiative mind.

Most people do not think. Some have not time to think. To that we shall revert. Of those who have leisure, nearly all put an end to their thinking by one of two modes of mind. On the one hand, many minds move in a circle. And again, many minds move in a straight line which ends in a half-truth, nicely expressed—like a pretty railway terminus.

Why do we allow children to copy half-truths from the copy-book head-lines? A proverb, or an aphorism is almost never a truth. But as it seems to be so, and as it seems to express well the first and last there is to be said about its subject, the mind is thenceforth closed to that subject. What we want in children is to open their minds to truth, and to keep them open. So soon as the mind admits that it has reached the end of an idea, that it has got to the bottom of a truth, the interest of the subject flags, thought loses life, and truth is robbed of moral force. We do much, I fear, to repress the child's initiative in thinking by the trite answers which we give to his questions. Nearly all of us try to give a final and complete answer to children's questions. That is the way to repress the child's activity. If you wish your child—

and some I know will not wish it—if you wish your child to keep alive the power of active thought, you must almost never give him a truth, even a simple fact, like the time of day; you must only help him to find it.

Let me give you an example of the repression of initiative in child-thought, taken from the sphere of conduct. A father finds his boy betting or gaming in some way, and says promptly and tritely: "My boy, you must not gamble; gambling is wrong." Thenceforward, in proportion to that boy's reverence for his father, the subject of gambling is a sealed book to him; "father says it's wrong" and there is an end of it. Very good, but I think I can show you a better. I shall relate an object lesson I once had presented to me. In a father's study, my chair towards the fire, my host behind me writing, I heard a knock at the door. Here followed a dialogue something like this:—

"Father, I want two shillings."

"What for, my boy?"

"There's a man in the market-place with a roulette-table, and some boys are getting money from him. I want to try."

I listened for the prompt refusal, but it did not come. I glanced round and saw the father holding his purse.

"All right, Fred, there's two shillings." Fred turned to go. "But no," the father added, "come here, Fred, I want you to gamble with me."

In a few minutes a sheet of paper was laid on the desk, parts of it were mapped out, and a spinning top was constructed.

"Now look here, Fred, these two shillings are yours. I've made you a present of them."

"All right."

"Well, you stake a penny or more each time on one of these colours, and we'll spin the top. Every time it stops on your colour, you get a penny from me. When it doesn't, I get a penny from you."

And so the game proceeded. Sometimes Fred won, sometimes the father. But the father had more capital, and after a little while Fred's two shillings had changed hands.

"Have you any money in your bank?"

"Yes, fifteen shillings."

"Well, we'll play for that."

That, too, was played for and lost. Thereafter followed a

suspiciously knowing discourse on the ways of gamblers, and some simple laws of chance. I could see that Fred didn't think much of gambling when it was done. At the end came this generous peroration:—"Well, Fred, here I have two shillings which were yours, I gave you them; and this fifteen shillings, which were yours, you had saved them. It's all mine now; I won it from you. But, for my part, I don't like getting money this way, I like best to earn money—to get it in return for work. So here you are, take it and be off."

Now if we wish children to avoid thinking in a short, straight line, or in a narrow circle, either about morals or about anything else, we must be careful not to repress imagination. Imagination, you will see, is the most initiative of all the functions of the mind, which we are accustomed to speak of as faculties. Nothing is so unaccountable, so independent of present conditions, and past experience; nothing resists custom or convention and habit so successfully. This, in the present regard, is the central consideration. All men and women of great initiative, are persons of a good imagination; they allow themselves to wander in fancy, in feeling, and in thought, into states other than the real or actual. Every virtuous feeling, I take it,—or, to put it more simply, that supreme virtue which includes all, implies a sentiment which is, in the full sense of the word, fellow-feeling. Now we must be careful not to think merely of fellow-suffering. The sentiment I mean, bespeaks an ability to enter into the lives of our neighbours, to realise their feelings—their pleasures and their pains—with a degree of vividness which comes near to making them our own. Into that quality, obviously, imagination largely enters. If I can think myself poor, I am more likely to be kind to the poor. If I can fancy myself in the life of a wealthy person, I shall be more likely to show tolerance for rich people.

Children have a great gift of imagination. I have already spoken of the mistake of stifling curiosity in children, and wonder, by an apparently final, though really half truthful, way of meeting their enquiries. In many cases, children should be allowed to find their own way out of those mazes of puzzlement in which they often come to us for rescue.

Acting in children is, I think, too much repressed. It speaks well for the child that he can call himself a king, or a burglar, or a calf, and behave accordingly. We should not

condemn it and put an end to it as silly. Then we have those endlessly quaint hallucinations or illusions of children, as when they see horsemen in the sky or jewels in the carpet, when they converse with imagined companions, apparently in incoherent monologue, but probably in quite consequent dialogue. All such imaginative activities should be allowed, I think, their full bent. I cannot now—it would be irrelevant to my text—speak of the dangers of imagination. Let me say only this: I do not think imagination can ever be too great, provided only you balance it with a very full experience. It is your child of inexperience, of limited sensations, and accordingly of insufficient common sense, in whom imagination is a snare and, literally, a delusion.

In this connection, surely, our ideas of falsehood require some enlightenment. Some of us are great sticklers for verbal truth. Let us suppose, for argument, that we approve of slight bodily punishment. A child is found in the drawing-room beside a shattered vase which he was forbidden to touch. "Who broke the vase, Tommy?" "Oh! a great black-beetle crept down the chimney and did it, mother." Here is rather a complicated situation. Suppose we box Tommy's ears. Very well; but if so, we should tell him to find the black-beetle and perform on him. We may be sure that the black-beetle is not quite apart, in the boy's imagination, from his own person, and he will probably not feel the punishment unjust. Some youths have a very imaginative way of looking on everything, and an apparently untruthful way of expressing common-place facts. Let me give an exaggerated example. "This is the afternoon of Friday, the 17th day of January, 1896," so one boy says. Afternoon, Friday, 17th day, January, 1896,—five statements in a breath, all quite correct. The other boy says: "It's not afternoon, it's not Friday, it's not the 17th day, it's not January, it's not 1896." We must not brand this boy a liar. This is only his way of saying that our names for times and seasons are artificial; that we might as well call this the year 5093, that months are neither here nor there, that he prefers to call this the plum-pudding day, and that afternoon is all nonsense, because it's really the before-midnight. Now there is some imagination in a view of time such as this. This boy is on the way towards realising that

days and hours are merely observations, and that the now—this moment—is merely a conscious point in an eternity.

I promised to revert to the subject of leisure, but I must do so only to pass from it. It is obvious that in order to think, one must have nothing else on hand. If we are to allow any play for initiative, we must abate, to some extent, that rule which is so common amongst us that every hour of the day should be occupied with some definite purpose. I do not so much plead for unoccupied time; but rather for allowing an easy margin in mapping out the hours for boys and girls, so that the mind, even in purposeful activity, has leisure to move spontaneously, and is not hustled.

I had meant to speak of another initiative in children, which makes for fellow-feeling, but I have not left room for it. I meant to enlarge on that great gift children have for making friends with all and sundry, and to suggest that we should be most careful almost never to put restrictions on their acquaintanceships.

What I have said, however confusedly, must, I think, have expressed, to some extent at least, the need which it seems to me the age has for men and women who will rebel successfully against the set ways of custom and precedent. It may be rash, but surely not, to trust a little more to the attractiveness of what is good and what is true, to believe that if the human spirit had a freer choice, if it had a fuller knowledge, if the real issues were more thoroughly grasped, men and women who are yet to come would more readily side with greater things than are represented in the aims and interests of our present day society. That is the sum and substance of my suggestions,—to give the spirit of children and of youth its freedom.

I think I know nearly all that can be said on the other side. But just let us look, in closing, at one solitary curse of our present life. How often do you meet a young man of ability who is *not* bent on making money and reputation? Almost never. How often do you meet a young woman of charm and power who cares nothing for society's prizes? Almost never. It is the way of the world,—has been for centuries—that individual worth should first realise itself in the current coin of the realm; then, and not till then, it may expect social recognition. That our boys and girls should have a tact and insight of their own, by which they will

divine real worth in however unlikely form, is not possible until you have so far set them free from this prejudice of custom. And freedom is approved to me because it is essential to a dream I sometimes indulge in, of a prophet who is yet to come. My dream is of a beautiful woman, whom I see move among the multitude of men. She looks abroad upon life and seems to know it all—as none of us know life, as no one before her has known it. She knows all that we call good, and all that we call bad, but she reaches out kindly to touch everything, as if nothing were, to her, wholly common and nothing wholly unclean. Her feet seek out strange and devious paths, and everywhere men and women leave their places and follow after her. Her hand is the hand of the skilful, and the hand-toilers look up to her as if to learn. Her eyes are clear, and seem to rest; she threads her way confidently and wisely in the crowd, and the puzzled and thoughtful rise and follow as one follows a teacher. The coarse and profligate hide from her, but she reaches them sometimes, and they, too, learn a better way. And the money-makers pause when my lady comes. They put a check upon their gambling, as unskilful artists desist in the presence of a master. *Their* tables, too, are overturned, and here, above all, she brings conviction. So she passes. And when she has passed, the streams of the world seem to run clean, and certainly they run brighter.

And if you say that my dream is hopeless, that a woman of such quality is impossible, that I have lent her power such as the world would never concede to her, I retort that we have no conception of the capability of the human spirit. That is a conviction which daily grows stronger with me, and the larger my experience of the ugly side of life, the stronger my belief in men and women grows. It is because I see more clearly every day that we bind the human spirit within a narrow cage, that its iron bars—the bars of custom and tradition—hamper and dwarf the life of man; it is because I see men and women immensely strong, in spite of their cramped and narrow life, that I have faith to believe that nothing of good is impossible to them if you give them freedom. We are like that primitive race who put bricks upon their children's heads because flat heads are the fashion of the people, and wooden moulds upon their children's feet because club feet are in vogue.